

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 19796

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: PFOR, CB, VS, TH

SUBJ: THAI-INDOCHINA RELATIONS

1. SUMMARY. THE THAI GOVERNMENT (RTG) HAS INVITED CAMBODIAN DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER IENG SARY TO VISIT THAILAND, BUT HE HAS REFUSED THE INVITATION. THAILAND IS WILLING TO BEGIN SELLING COMMODITIES TO CAMBODIA PRIOR TO OPENING DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS. THE RTG IS INCREASINGLY CONCERNED WITH BORDER PROBLEMS WITH LAOS AND HOPES TO RETURN TO LAOS MEO TRIBAL REFUGEES CURRENTLY IN THAILAND. THE RTG IS WILLING TO RESUME DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH SOUTH VIETNAM BUT WILL PROBABLY HAVE TO WAIT UNTIL IT HAS FORMAL TIES WITH NORTH VIETNAM. END SUMMARY.

2. TWO EMBASSY OFFICERS SPOKE WITH THAI MFA SE ASIA DIVISION CHIEF M.R. THEP THEWAKUN ON 18 SEPTEMBER. DURING THE DISCUSSION THEP SAID THAT THE RTG HAD INVITED CAMBODIAN DEPUTY PREMIER IENG SARY TO VISIT THAILAND, BUT THAT HE HAS DECLINED THE INVITATION. THEP SAID THAT THAILAND STANDS READY TO RESUME DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH CAMBODIA AT ANY TIME. HE SAID THAT THE RTG IS IN CONTACT WITH CAMBODIAN OFFICIALS AT THE UNITED NATIONS AND AT A

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LOWER LEVEL ALONG THE THAI-KHMER FRONTIER. THE RTG IS IN

CONTACT WITH A CAMBODIAN OFFICAL, HAK SRENG, IN NORTHWESTERN CAMBODIA WHO IS AUTHORIZED TO BUY NECESSARY FOOD AND FUEL COMMODITIES FOR CAMBODIA AND WHOM THE KHMER GOVERNMENT HAS AUTHORIZED TO CONFER WITH THE THAI ON MATTERS THAT ARISE.

3. THEP SAID THAT THAILAND WILL BEGIN TRADING WITH CAMBODIA, ALTHOUGH THE MEDIUM OF EXCHANGE REMAINS TO BE DECIDED. HE COMMENTED THAT, BY SELLING MUCH-NEEDED RICE TO CAMBODIA, THAILAND WOULD GAIN FOREIGN EXCHANGE WHILE HELPING TO ALLEVIATE THE CONDITIONS IN CAMBODIA WHICH ENCOURAGE CMABODIANS TO FLEE TO THAILAND AS REFUGEES. ACCORDING TO THEP, IENG SARY COMPLAINED IN NEW YORK THAT UNDER CURRENT SMUGGLING ARRANGEMENTS, CAMBODIA HAD TO PAY ALMOST THREE TIMES THE FIAR MARKET PRICE FOR ITS PURCHASES. THEP THOUGHT THE ALLEGATION WAS CORRECT.

4. ON THE SUBJECT OF THAI RELATIONS WITH LAOS, THEP SAID THAT THE RTG IS CONCERNED OVER THE LONG-STANDING PROBLEM OF RENEGOTIATING THE THAI-LAO BORDER ALONG THE MEKONG. THE EXISTING BORDER WAS DRAWN UP DURING THE DAYS OF FRENCH RULE IN INDOCHINA AND FAVORS THE LAO. THE SITUATION IS EXACERBATED BY THE FACT THAT THE CHANNEL OF THE MEKONG HAS SHIFTED IN VARIOUS PLACES SO THAT, DURING LOW WATER PERIODS, THAI PATROL CRAFT CANNOT NAVIGATE THE RIVER BECAUSE WATER ON THE THAI SIDE IS TOO SHALLOW IN PLACES. THEP SAID FRANKLY THAT THE RTG WAS HAVING NO LUCK GETTING THE LAO TO FOCUS ON THIS ISSUE.

5. ANOTHER THAI-LAO PROBLEM RELATED TO THE BORDER DEMARKATION IS THAT OF SMUGGLING. THE TROUBLE USUALLY OCCURS WHEN A SMUGGLER IS LEAVING LAOS AND THE PL OPEN FIRE OR TRY TO GIVE CHASE, CLAIMING THAT AT THAT POINT THE CHANNEL AND HENCE THE BORDER STILL LIE BETWEEN THE SMUGGLER'S CRAFT AND THE THAI BANK OF THE RIVER. TYPICALLY, THE THAI DISAGREE AND ASSERT THAT THE BOAT IS ALREADY IN THAI TERRITORY WHICH THE PL ARE VIOLATING.

6. CONCERNING TRIBAL MEO REFUGEES IN THAILAND, THEP SAID THAT THAILAND CANNOT AND WILL NOT FORCIBLY STOP THESE

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PEOPLE FROM ENTERING THAILAND, BUT BLUNTLY ADDED THAT THAILAND ALREADY HAS 500,000 MEO THAT IT DOES NOT WANT, AND CERTAINLY DOES NOT WANT MORE. HE ASSERTED THAT AMNY OF THE MEO REFUGEES ENTERING THAILAND ARE OPIUM ADDICTS AND THAT MANY ARE NOW DYING BECAUSE THEY CANNOT SUPPORT THEIR HABIT. HE SAID THE ONLY SOLUTION TO THIS THORNY PROBLEM WAS FOR THE LAO GOVERNMENT TO ACCEPT THEM BACK AND HOPED ALOUD THAT THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES WOULD BE

ABLE TO NEGOTIATE A SOLUTION. COMMENT: THEP THEWAKUN IS TOO INTELLIGENT AND WELL-READ TO BELIEVE THE OPIUM ADDICTION IS THE CAUSE OF THE MISERY OF THE MEO REFUGEES IN THAILAND. HIS ATTITUDE SUGGESTS THAT, LIKE MOST THAI OFFICIALS, HE HOPES THAT THE PROBLEM WILL DISAPPEAR IF IT IS IGNORED. END COMMENT.

7. TURNING TO VIETNAM, THEP SAID THAT THE RTG STANDS READY TO RESUME DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH SOUTH VIETNAM AT ANY TIME BUT ADMITTED THAT, REALISTICALLY, THAILAND CAN ONLY EXPECT TO HAVE DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH SAIGON AFTER IT HAS THEM WITH HANOI. HE GAVE NO INDICATION THAT THE RTG WAS CLOSE TO RECOGNIZING NORTH VIETNAM AND NOTED THAT FOREIGN MINISTER CHATCHAI CHUNHAWAN WOULD ONLY VISIT HANOI AFTER ALL ARRANGEMENTS WERE MADE TO FORMALIZE BILATERAL DIPLOMATIC TIES.

8. COMMENT: CHATCHAI HAS SPOKEN FREQUENTLY OF VISITING NORTH VIETNAM AS PART OF HIS CAMPAIGN OF PERSONAL DIPLOMACY IN BUILDING BRIDGES WITH COMMUNIST COUNTRIES. RECENTLY CHATCHAI HAS SAID HE IS LESS EAGER TO VISIT HANOI AS NORTH VIETNAMESE INVECTIVE TOWARDS THAILAND HAS CONTINUED UNABATED.

9. WE CONSIDER THEP'S REMARKS A CANDID AS WELL AS INFORMED ACCOUNT OF THE CURRENT STATE OF PLAY IN THAI-INDOCHINA RELATIONS. FROM THE LOOKS OF THINGS, SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENTS IN THESE RELATIONS ARE LIKELY TO TAKE PLACE ONLY SLOWLY, IF AT ALL.
MASTERS

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